
7 IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

Based on the research findings contained in this report, and after obtaining input from various segments of the Blacksburg community, RKG Associates, Inc. prepared an economic development strategic action plan. Many of the land use and zoning recommendations were developed from the findings of a concurrent study prepared by RKG Associates entitled, *Cost of Land Uses Study*, which was completed in January 2000. *The Cost of Land Uses Study* examined various growth and development options for the community based on existing zoning, historical development patterns, and anticipated growth and economic development needs over the next 20 years.

A. FOCUS OF STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

The following chapter contains an action plan matrix that organizes and presents the vision, goals, and actions contained in the Town's economic development strategic plan. The 2020 Blacksburg Economic Development Strategic Plan contains roughly 90 recommendations organized under six main topics: (1) Downtown Revitalization, (2) Business Development & Assistance, (3) Industrial Development, (4) Housing, (5) Neighborhood Enhancement, and (6) Quality of Life. The policy direction of the action plan was shaped by input obtained from several different groups including the general public, a strategic plan steering committee comprised of members of the Business Relations Advisory Committee, and a visioning group consisting of members of the business community, general public, university officials, and local government leaders. In addition, two expert panel group meetings were conducted with representatives from retail, service, manufacturing, and R&D industries in Blacksburg.

B. PRIORITY ACTIONS

Over the next five to ten years it is recommended that the Town of Blacksburg focus on the following priority actions in order to achieve its economic development vision. Although the plan recommends dozens of other actions to be completed during this time frame, the top ten actions should receive the highest implementation priority.

1. Establish an Economic Development Corporation to Manage the Economic Development Affairs of the Town

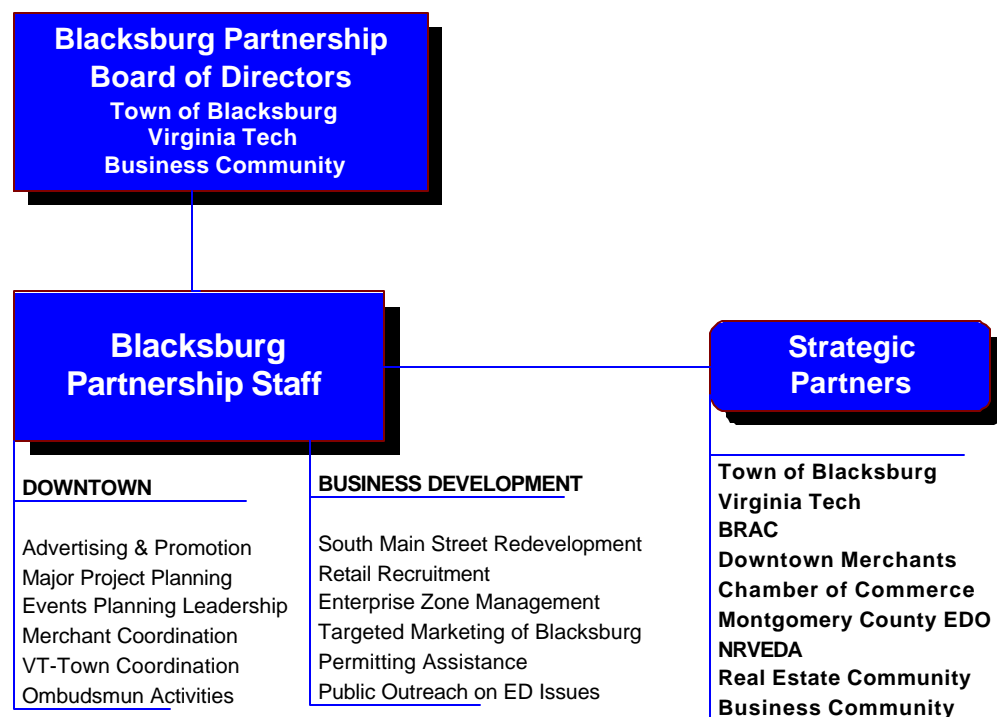
The Town of Blacksburg is large enough and the economic development needs of the community are important enough to justify the creation of a quasi-public authority to manage the Town economic development affairs. There are a number of complex initiatives that must be pursued over the next 10 years that will require a significant

commitment of staff and financial resources to implement. Currently, the Town of Blacksburg is not positioned well to capitalize on its opportunities and must hire the promotional, real estate development, and deal-making expertise it needs to be successful.

It is therefore recommended that an economic development authority, called the Blacksburg Partnership be established, which would bring the Town government, Virginia Tech administration, and the Blacksburg business community into a partnership organization. The diagram below illustrates how the partnership might be organized, what its responsibilities would be, and whom it might target as strategic partners.

A 13- to 15-person board of directors would govern and direct the activities of the partnership. The board would be comprised of appointed representatives from the Town of Blacksburg, both hired and elected officials, the Virginia Tech administration, and members of the business community.

For the first several years, the organization would be funded through donations and financial contributions from the three partners until a more sustainable funding mechanism can be identified. As a non-profit organization, the Partnership would engage in annual fundraising activities, submit foundation and government grant proposals, impose membership fees, and receive annual budget appropriations. In later years it may be necessary to establish a Business Improvement District (BID) to fund the operations and activities of the organization. A description of BIDs is presented later in this chapter.



2. Initiate Downtown Promotional/Ad Campaign

In conjunction with the Town's Downtown Revitalization Study, a series of promotional and advertising concepts have been developed. The objective of these campaigns are to (1) promote Downtown Blacksburg and the community as a whole to a broader market outside of Blacksburg and (2) promote the benefits of shopping existing downtown businesses. Downtown Blacksburg lacks a clear and identifiable image or identity. It is important that all town residents, visitors, and shoppers know what Downtown Blacksburg has to offer. Specific recommendations regarding how the Town should promote and market itself are described in the Town's Downtown Revitalization Plan, recently completed by Marshall Clarke Architects of Greenville, SC.

Establish Downtown Business Improvement District - In order to fund this promotional effort, as well as many other downtown needs, the Town should consider the creation of a Business Improvement District or BID. BIDs are successfully used in many downtowns across the country to fund a wide range of needs. A BID is a voluntary special taxing district that is self-imposed by a group of property owners in a specific area. At least 51 percent of the district's property owners must agree to be assessed an additional tax on real estate, in exchange for a higher level of services such as: increased security, street clean-up and trash removal, street and sidewalk maintenance, promotion and advertising, events planning, and downtown management. The funds generated by the BID would be used in conjunction with appropriations made by Virginia Tech and the Town of Blacksburg.

3. Adopt a Retail Recruitment Strategy

The Town has two primary retail needs that must be met through this action. Number one, the community desires to attract a general merchandise store to serve the needs of local residents. Secondly, the community would like to change the mix of businesses located in the downtown in order to appeal to a broader customer base including students, families, and visitors. A business recruitment strategy will allow the Town of Blacksburg to attract the type of businesses that are best suited for the community and that offer the range of goods and services desired by local residents. A retail and service business recruitment program will require the following:

- Identify Business Targets – RKG Associates, Inc. has identified a number of potential business targets for the town of Blacksburg as shown below. In order to begin recruiting companies the Town must first identify a list of individual businesses by name and address. This can be done in a number of different ways, but the most reliable method is through the use of Dun & Bradstreet's direct marketing database of over 11 million US businesses. The town should focus its efforts on regional businesses that are familiar with Blacksburg and have been experiencing growth in annual sales and employment over the past three years or are actively seeking new locations. Commercial Realtors should also be consulted at this stage in order to identify the types of businesses that may be looking for space in Blacksburg. Realtors are typically the first contact for persons seeking commercial real estate. They will know the types and space needs of businesses looking to enter the Blacksburg/Montgomery County market.

The following list contains a variety of store types or specific retail stores that are possible targets for Blacksburg.

General Merchandise Store <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Med-size Department Store (50,000-75,000 SF) 	Food Stores <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specialty Food Stores • Health and Natural Food Stores • International and Ethnic Food Store
Apparel Stores <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Off-price Retail Stores <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Men's Warehouse - Coat World - Bob's Stores - Nordstrom Rack - Today's Man 	Furniture and Home Furnishings Stores <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home Goods • Pier 1 Imports • Brookstone Outlet
Eating and Drinking Places <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Chain Restaurants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - TGI Fridays - UNO Pizzeria - Chili's 	Specialty Retailers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sporting Goods • Camera and Photography • Records and CDs • PETCO • Mom & Pop Stores

- Cooperate with Property Owners to Market Viable Business Properties – Business recruitment programs are typically designed to attract businesses to existing vacant properties. In order to market these properties to new businesses, the Town will have to create partnerships with local property owners and real estate brokers. The Town, through its economic development corporation, must seek the cooperation of local property owners to jointly market vacant properties to a targeted group of businesses. The nature of this relationship is purely voluntary and specific owners may choose not to adhere to the Town's leasing requirements. However, if the owner does cooperate with the Town, the owner may receive leasing assistance, market information and materials, direct mailing, and staff resources needed to recruit new businesses to the vacant building.

In addition to finding tenants for vacant properties, the same recruitment strategy can be used to attract more diverse businesses to Blacksburg. In order to change the business mix in the Downtown, for example, a concerted effort is needed to recruit businesses that offer expanded retailing to a broader customer base. Given the downtown's low vacancy rate, there may be very few opportunities to relocate new businesses into that setting. As such, an increased level of cooperation is needed between the Town and downtown property owners to achieve a more diversified business mix in the district. Both parties must recognize the importance of this goal and work in partnership to achieve it. As new store vacancies occur in the future, both the Town and downtown property owners must work in tandem to recruit new businesses that complement the commercial district. Property owners will feel pressure to lease vacant space quickly to

avoid revenue losses, however, the Town must have an aggressive and organized marketing and recruitment program in place to find the right business in a timely fashion.

- Develop Property Data Sheets and Marketing Materials – In order to recruit targeted businesses the Town must provide prospects with basic information about building space that is available for sale or lease, land parcels that may be available for development, as well as demographic and market related information about the Blacksburg market. The following table contains a short-list of information that might be included in a targeted recruitment package:

Real Estate Information	Demographic & Market Information
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional Location Map • Site Map • Building Floor Plan • Pictures of the Subject Building or Land Parcel • Description of Land and Building Space and Parking (including square footage, acres, number of parking spaces) • Asking Lease Rate/Sales Price • Tenant Fit-up Options • Terms of Lease or Sale • Name of Real Estate Broker or Agent (if any) and Phone Number 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Population Trends and Characteristics • Population Age Cohorts • Median Household Income • Per Capita Income • Consumer Spending Potential by Spending Category • Spending Leakage by Category • Store Counts and Annual Sales

- Direct Mail and Telephone Follow-up – Once a targeted prospect list has been developed, a direct mail campaign should be initiated to recruit potential business prospects. The EDC staff or a professional Realtor should make direct contact with these companies. This program can be implemented in conjunction with local Realtors, who may be listing the subject properties.

Prospects that have some interest in relocating to Blacksburg should be invited to Blacksburg to view the community and to see potential business locations. It is important that the Blacksburg Partnership have an up-to-date database of properties to show prospects. All serious prospects should be assisted by the Partnership to ensure that all town permitting matters have been addressed and that the property owner is satisfied.

Note: It is important to note that Realtors must be informed about the business recruitment program, its goals, and business targets. Realtors will be much more willing to participate in the program if their standard commissions on the sale or lease of property are protected. A standard brokerage fee agreement is needed to encourage the cooperation of the real estate community.

4. Work Closely With Virginia Tech to Plan for Future Enrollment Increases and Student Housing Needs

The Town's biggest challenge in the future will be providing for the housing needs of new residents, many of who may become new students at Virginia Tech. A closer partnership with Virginia Tech is needed in order to plan for potential enrollment increases at the University over the next decade as it strives to meet its goal to become a Top-30 research institution in the country.

The Town should encourage the university to explore options for developing new student housing on university-owned land. It is being recommended that outside developers be solicited to develop new multi-unit housing under long-term land lease arrangement. This will place less demand of public services, will conserve open space, and encourage infill development on Virginia Tech's land. Developers and private property management firms will be responsible for the construction, maintenance and management of all residential buildings and grounds. These developments would function similar to other apartment complexes in Town, but the University would receive a land lease payment from the project's revenue stream. In addition, Virginia Tech would not have to incur the large capital cost of building new dormitory space on campus.

5. Prepare a Redevelopment Plan for the South Main Street Corridor

Due to the lack of commercially-zoned, developable land in Blacksburg, the Town must seek opportunities to redevelop areas that are currently under performing or are underutilizing land resources. The South Main Street corridor is the Town's primary redevelopment corridor, as evidenced by a concentration of neglected, declining, and undersized properties. The town has the opportunity to upgrade land uses along this corridor, which will increase property values, create more viable uses, create jobs, and improve the appearance of a prime gateway into the community.

There are a number of steps required to prepare the South Main corridor for revitalization. The Town should consider the following tasks and issues before undertaking this initiative.

- Prepare South Main Redevelopment Plan – Before the Town designates the South Main Street Redevelopment district, it must first understand the land use, real estate, and public improvement issues associated with this corridor. The Town should commission a comprehensive redevelopment plan that examines opportunities for redevelopment and addresses the following redevelopment objectives:
 - a) Defines and improves the appearance of the Town's primary southern gateway;
 - b) Increases the tax base and municipal revenue potential of this area;
 - c) Upgrades the appearance, diversity, and density of land uses;
 - d) Creates opportunities for larger-scale redevelopment projects;
 - e) Encourages the reuse of underutilized commercial properties;
 - f) Creates new employment opportunities; and
 - g) Improves the overall investment climate within the corridor.

- Identify Redevelopment Strategy for Blacksburg Square Shopping Center – The Blacksburg Square Shopping Center on South Main Street is a 1960-70s vintage shopping plaza that has exceeded its useful life in its current state. There is very little evidence that investments are being made in the property and the shopping center's appearance is dated and unappealing to tenants. There are currently five separate property owners, consisting of four investment groups and AT&T. The total site is roughly 12 acres, with 124,000 SF of commercial space on site (Table 7-1). The largest building is the former K-Mart storefront, which contains nearly 56,000 SF of building space, which is less than half the size of most big-box stores in today's market. Currently, Virginia Tech is leasing this space for surplus equipment storage and for the University printing shop. Wade's Supermarket has occupied the other large retail space in the shopping center, but they are reportedly vacating the space due to recent rent increases.

Although outdated, this shopping center offers the best opportunity for Blacksburg to recapture a medium-sized general merchandise store, due primarily to its location. However, this will be very difficult to do under current conditions, because the region's retail gravity has shifted to Christiansburg, retail climate along the South Main Street corridor is not strong, and the building space is substandard in today's market. At this time, the entire shopping center must be renovated to improve its market appeal. At the same time, the South Main Street corridor must be upgraded to improve its overall appearance and to spur other private redevelopment initiatives.

Table 7-1
Blacksburg Square Property
Property Ownership (2001)

OWNER NAME	BLDG. NO.	ADDRESS	ACREAGE	BDLG. SF	LANDVAL	BLDGVAL	TOTVAL	SALESYEAR	SALESVAL
CONNER MANGUS & TULL PARTNERSHIP	1403	S MAIN ST	0.72	15960	\$ 117,300.00	\$ 474,800.00	\$ 592,100.00	99	\$ -
LEGEND BLACKSBURG SQUARE LLC	1323	S MAIN ST	5.22	47997	\$ 495,800.00	\$ 1,357,900.00	\$ 1,853,700.00	99	\$ 2,000,000
BLACKSBURG PARTNERS	1411	S MAIN ST	5.63	56500	\$ 626,400.00	\$ 1,621,100.00	\$ 2,247,500.00	83	\$ 2,700,000
BNE RESTAURANT GROUP III LLC	1311	S MAIN ST	0.47	3360	\$ 119,200.00	\$ 273,600.00	\$ 392,800.00	97	\$ -
AMERICAN TELEPHONE & TELEGRAPH		S MAIN ST	0.81	646	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	86	\$ -
			12.85	124463	\$ 1,358,700.00	\$ 3,727,400.00	\$ 5,086,100.00		

In order to redevelop the Blacksburg Square site, the following issues must be addressed:

- Fragmented Property Ownership – Currently there are three separate private investment groups that own portions of the main retail building. BNE Restaurant Group III LLC owns the Hardee's restaurant that is located on an out-parcel. This fractured ownership will make redevelopment more difficult because the three parties will have different investment motives, resources, and interest in the property. Ideally, a consolidated ownership of this facility would improve the chances of success. This might be possible if a local investment group or limited partnership were to purchase the property, but this assumes that the existing owners would be willing to sell their interest or join the partnership. Ultimately, it would be desirable to have the shopping center under single ownership and with master lease provisions. A master lease contains covenants that are passed on to tenants and control such

items as cleanliness of display windows, external noise or light, signage standards, maintenance of facades, and hours of business operation.

- b) Consider Rezoning and Increase Allowable Density – It is quite possible that the site is no longer a viable retail property for several reasons. The cost of renovating the buildings may be cost prohibitive given the lower lease rates achievable at this location. If this is so, there is very little incentive for someone to reinvest in an aging shopping center located in a declining commercial corridor. The shift in retail gravity to Christiansburg increases the investment risk associated with this property, because it reduces the number of potential tenants and build-to-suit users that might be drawn to this location.

If these assumptions are true, it may be necessary for the Town to rezone the property in order to stimulate redevelopment. This could be achieved by changing the zoning and the range of permitted uses. In addition, increased development densities could create enough incentive for the existing owners or a new owner to redevelop the site. Rezoning of the property to high-density residential, R&D, or professional office would focus redevelopment on three market segments that are both strong and deep in Blacksburg and that would view this as a prime location. Assuming a FAR of .50, this site could support over 260,000 SF of new office space. The increased building square footage and higher lease rates could generate annual gross lease revenues that are three to four times what they are today. More study is needed before this recommendation can be made.

- Establish a South End Tax Increment Financing (TIF) District – The governing body of any county, city or town may adopt tax increment financing by passing an ordinance designating a development project area and providing that real estate taxes in the development project area are assessed, collected, and allocated in a manner that secures future debt obligations until they are repaid. TIF is a financing tool that can be used to redirect future real estate tax revenues derived from a redevelopment target area to cover annual debt service payments on public bond obligations. A tax basis is initially set which represents the base assessed values of all properties located in the study area. As redevelopment occurs, and as assessed values increase, the additional real estate taxes derived from the increased value are deposited into a separate fund known as the “Tax Increment Financing Fund.” This revenue stream is then used to cover debt service payments associated with the issuance of bond obligations. These bond obligations can be issued by a unit of local government or economic development authority for a variety of improvement projects located in the redevelopment area such as: building acquisition, building demolition, real estate development, streetscape improvements, and similar improvements.

The governing body shall hold a public hearing on the need for tax increment financing in the Town prior to adopting a tax increment financing ordinance. Once all debt obligations are paid off, the Tax Increment Financing Fund can be dissolved by the Town through the passage of a new ordinance.

The actual revenue stream generated by a South Main Street TIF district may be limited, unless the County's portion of the real estate tax rate is included. The Town's portion is only \$0.20 per \$100 of assessed value. The county rate is over three times the Town rate and thus would generate three times the tax revenue. Redirecting the County's tax revenues will require the authorization of the Board of Supervisors and could be more difficult to pass.

6. Work With VT to Seek Higher Utilization of Prime Retail Properties at University Boulevard and South Main Street

Virginia Tech currently occupies the two best locations for a general merchandise store of 50,000 SF to 75,000 SF to locate. This condition has the potential to stifle the Town's plans to attract a general merchandise store to the community. Local officials must communicate the town's needs to Virginia Tech and work with property owners to identify suitable locations to support this type of use.

Nationally, the number of medium-size department stores is dwindling. The trend is toward market consolidation and the construction of regional superstores in the 150,000 to 200,000 SF range. The two buildings currently occupied by Virginia Tech's Math Emporium (University City Mall) and the University Printing Center (Blacksburg Square Shopping Center) are undersized by today's standards, approximately 50,000 SF. These buildings are also located in secondary and tertiary commercial locations. The retail shift that has occurred in the region has reduced Blacksburg's prominence as a retail center.

However, the residents of Blacksburg desire to have a general merchandiser in town if possible. As such, the Blacksburg Partnership should make a coordinated attempt to address this local need. The Blacksburg Partnership should employ the approach detailed earlier in the retail recruitment strategy. However, it must first make contact with the current owners to understand their long-term investment plans for the property. The Partnership may also be responsible for identifying a group of local investors to acquire the property under a limited partnership.

7. Establish Blacksburg's Role as a Leader in Electronic Government and Business Support Services

The Town has taken its eye off the Electronic Village concept that once brought it so much attention and notoriety during the early 1990s. Since that time, many other communities have entered the electronic village/e-government arena. However, the most successful communities will be the ones with the most advanced infrastructure and technology, innovative applications, and comprehensive delivery systems to the public. It is therefore recommended that the Town recommit itself to a new generation of e-government initiatives in order to regain its position as an innovative and technologically advanced community. Building a reputation in this area will set the community apart from other competitive locations and give the community a marketable commodity to promote to new technology companies.

E-Government initiatives

The Town is currently developing an eGovernment strategy, which will focus on four primary areas:

- Services and Transactions - e-commerce types of applications, bills, payments, permits etc.
- Internal Government Operations - intranet, employee self service, purchasing, expense reports, etc.
- Government to Government - electronic communication with county, state, federal and regional agencies.
- Community Engagement – providing ways for citizens to participate in local government through the World Wide Web.

In addition, the Town has plans to implement other e-government services such as:

- Online Cemetery Application - locate vacant plots and information on occupied plots
- Blacksburg Transit AVL System - Internet bus locator system.
- Para-transit Scheduling System - Scheduling and routing for our transit service for the disabled.
- Online Purchasing Department – Will implement electronic procurement functions.
- Paperless Town Council packets – This has been partially implemented to date.
- Online Digital Public Access Television - On the Town's web site.

Electronic Economic and Neighborhood Development Initiatives

In addition to its e-government efforts, the Town would like to build a comprehensive economic development web site that promotes business development. Some related projects in this area include:

- Virtual Business Incubator – Is planned for implementation in the fall of 2001. This will provide low cost web design and hosting for local businesses for an initial incubator period. Also provide technical and site marketing training for the business.
- Online Business Directory – Is planned for implementation in 2001. Online listing of participating Blacksburg businesses.
- Commercial/Industrial Property Listings - list commercial and office sites for sale and lease in Town.
- On-line neighborhoods - Is planned for implementation in 2001. Will include bulletin board sites for neighborhood groups to post information. Also will include secure neighborhood resident listings and a neighborhood list serve.
- Cedar Hill Fiber-To-The-Home Project – plan to provide fiber optics to the Cedar Hill residential development as a demonstration project.
- Town-wide Fiber Optics Coverage Plan – plan to provide fiber optics to all Blacksburg homes.

8. Maintain an Inventory of Available Properties and Work with Property Owners to Secure Tenants

In order to recruit new companies and businesses to Blacksburg, the Town must first create a complete inventory of properties to market. The best sources of real estate information are individual real estate brokers who represent property owners and industrial/economic development authorities. However, there is no single source of this property information in Blacksburg. The Town, through its new economic development corporation, should establish a central clearinghouse of real estate that is for sale and lease. Cooperative agreements with local Realtors, Montgomery County's Economic Development Office, and the New River Valley Economic Development Alliance must be established in order for this to be accomplished.

This information should be maintained in a database format and should be linked to GIS mapping software. In the future, these site profiles should be accessible on a web site for general viewing. The type of information contained in each profile should include:

Property Inventory Information

- ☐ Regional Location Map
 - ☐ Site Map or Plat Survey
 - ☐ Building Floor Plan
 - ☐ Pictures of the Subject Building or Land Parcel
 - ☐ Description of Land and Building Space and Parking (including building square footage, size of property (acres), number of parking spaces)
 - ☐ Asking Lease Rate/Sales Price
 - ☐ Tenant Fit-up Options
 - ☐ Terms of Lease or Sale
 - ☐ Name of Real Estate Broker or Other Agent (if any) and Phone Number
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9. Consider Careful Rezoning of Areas for Commercial Development in the Northwest and Southwest Districts

The Town of Blacksburg currently lacks the appropriate land resources required to support future residential and commercial growth. Consequently, the Town must consider rezoning certain areas of the community to accommodate new growth and to encourage redevelopment. The Town's land use priorities include:

Land Use Priorities

- Rezone Areas for Retail and Multi-Unit Residential Uses – The Town is not well positioned to accommodate the future demand for multi-unit residential and commercial development. A number of rezoning recommendations are described later in this section.
- Monitor Status of Key Development Areas and Adopt Rezoning Recommendations When Necessary – There are several key parcels in Blacksburg that are critical to the Town's growth and development future. Therefore, the Town must monitor the status of these parcels and be prepared to take action to promote the proper development of these sites.

- Study the Benefits of Creating a “South Main Street Enterprise District” and Package Redevelopment Incentives (TIF Financing) - The South Main Street Corridor is an important gateway for the Town and the economic development potential of this area is significant.
- Establish Site and Building Design Standards and Transition From the “Planned Commercial” Approval Process – RKG believes that the planned commercial (PC) zoning process needs to be modified. While it is apparent that the Town desires to control the aesthetics of new commercial development in certain areas of town, the current Planning Commercial zoning procedure appears to leave too much discretionary power in the hands of the planning staff and commission. The current project review process is attractive for the Town, but can create a perception among members of the development community that the Town can and will impose uneven standards on development proposals. Therefore, it is suggested that the Town adopt site and building design standards as part of the PC zoning process and then designate areas in Town where these special standards will be applied.

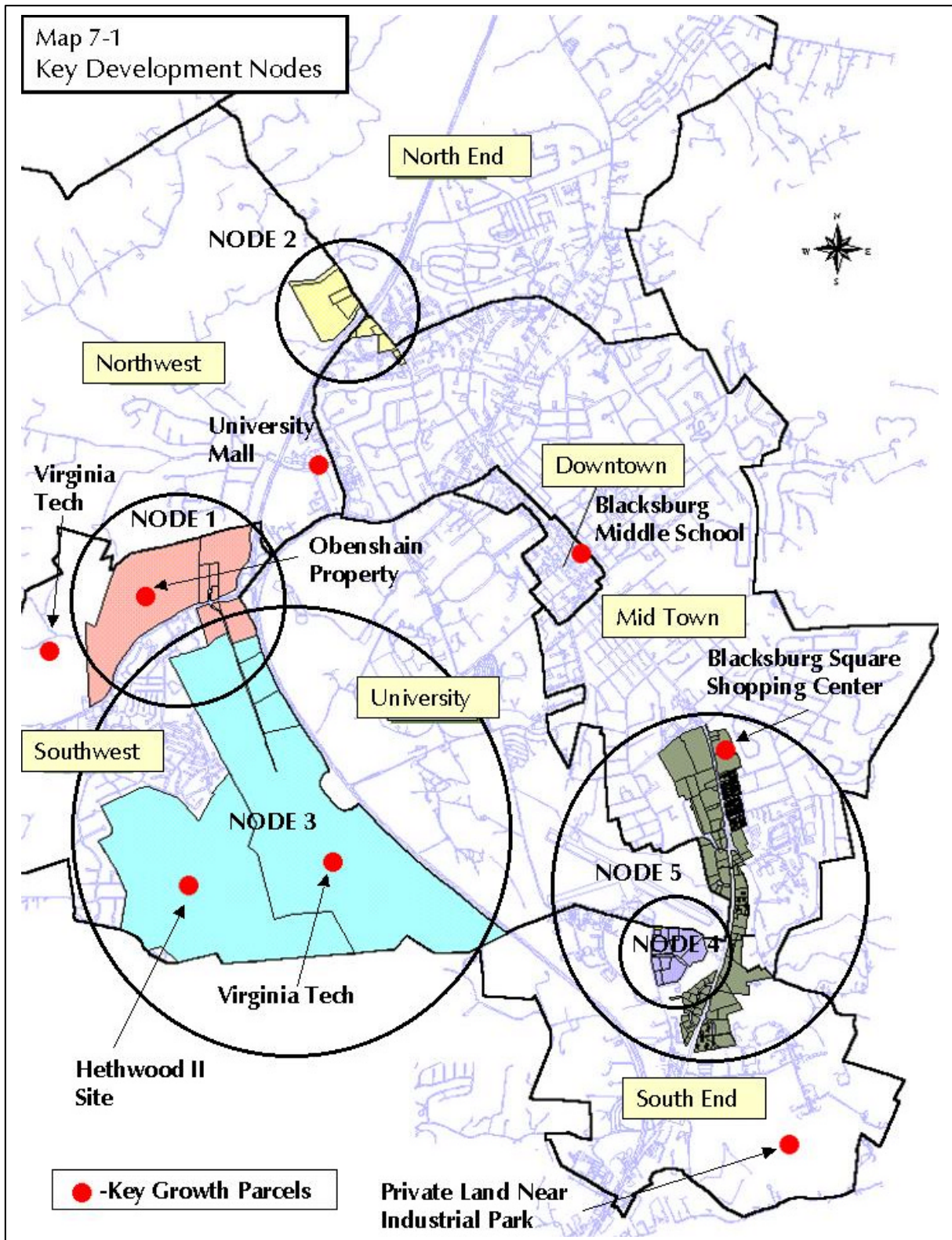
If the Town desires to control the aesthetic quality of commercial development, then it is only fair that it communicate these standards to the development community in advance. Developers will then know when and where these higher standards will be applied. Planned Commercial zones should be designated in areas where the Town wants to encourage higher quality development. Such areas might be located at key intersections, in the downtown, or at gateway locations. PC zoning can be implemented as an overlay zoning requirement.

Rezoning Recommendations

RKG Associates has identified six development nodes that are best suited to accommodate Blacksburg’s future growth needs (Map 7-1). These nodes have been designated based on their location, access to roadways, and the availability of developable land. The actual development futures of these nodes will be determined by the community as it weighs its growth needs against quality of life needs. Within several of these growth nodes are key (re)development parcels that possess unique development opportunities for the Town. RKG recommends that the Town monitor the status of these parcels and work with property owners to ensure that these parcels are developed (or not developed) in a manner that is consistent with the Town’s growth objectives.

The five new development nodes include:

- Prices Fork Road Node
- Toms Creek Road/Route 460 Bypass Node
- Hethwood/Plantation Road Node
- Ramble Road Node
- South Main Street Node



a) Price Fork Road Area**Existing Land Use and Zoning**

The Prices Fork Road redevelopment area is located to the west of the Route 460 Bypass at the Prices Fork Road interchange. The area currently has a small collection of commercial lots, including two hotels and a bank. These properties have extensive street frontage along the Route 460 Bypass and Prices Fork Road. In total, the properties included in the redevelopment area cover almost 200 acres. The anchor of this site is the Obenshain property. This 133-acre parcel is currently undeveloped and has the strongest growth potential in the area (Map 7-2).

The zoning in this area is a mix of commercial and residential zones. The smaller properties are zoned various commercial designations (General Commercial, Office, and Planned Commercial). The Obenshain property and the Bypass frontage lot are zoned Rural Residential (RR-1). Under current zoning, the area does not offer any opportunity to meet the potential growth needs of Blacksburg for commercial or medium-density residential development.

Zoning Recommendations

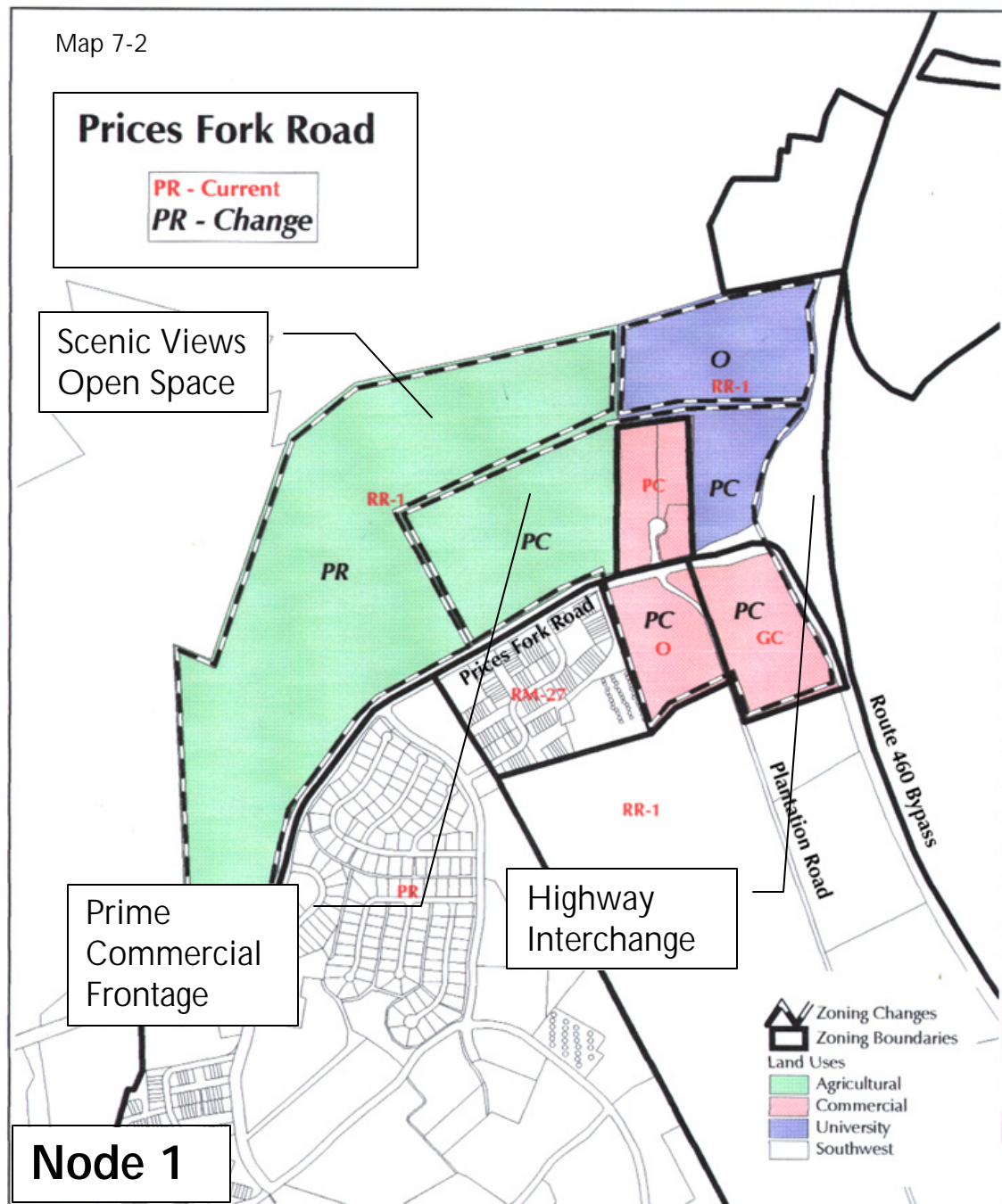
RKG recommends a more coherent and comprehensive rezoning of this area. The existing commercial lots, a 30-40 acre frontage portion of the Obenshain parcel, and a portion of the site west of the Prices Fork-460 Bypass interchange fronting Prices Fork Road should be rezoned to Planned Commercial (PC).¹ By making this change, the Town opens up the potential for a commercial node to develop that will serve this prime residential growth area in the Southwest District (also discussed in the Hethwood/Plantation Road area zoning recommendation). In addition, it is quite possible that additional residential development could occur outside the Blacksburg Town limits further down Prices Fork Road in the future. This potential increase in population will generate new demand for more retail and service opportunities in this area of Blacksburg.

The Planned Commercial (PC) zoning designation provides the Town with control over the design standards of these sites without limiting the potential use of this land for commercial use. The remainder of the interchange site, currently owned by Virginia Tech, should be rezoned for office use. This area could serve the need for additional office space in Town as well as spillover demand from the University as it continues to expand. This site has easy access from the 460 Bypass and would be visible from both the highway and Prices Fork Road.

The remainder of the Obenshain property should be promoted as a Planned Residential area. As detailed in the *Blacksburg Cost of Land Uses Study*, there is a significant demand for additional mixed residential housing. The Obenshain property is believed to be one of the most practical locations for a mixture of housing types due to its proximity to Virginia Tech, its adequate highway access, and its continuity with the mixed residential development across Prices Fork Road in the Foxridge development. The site

¹ See above recommendation regarding Planned Commercial (PC).

has adequate land area to sufficiently buffer these uses from the single-family homes to the north of the property while still allowing the owner ample space for construction. Given the large size and the scenic and open space value of this site, careful site planning will be required in order to preserve some of the natural qualities of this site.



Development Potential

- Planned Commercial
- Planned Residential
- Office
- Hotel/Services

Development Issues

- Key Open Space Resource
- Emerging Growth Area
- Good Access & Visibility

- Support Larger Uses
- Suitable for Multi-Unit Res.

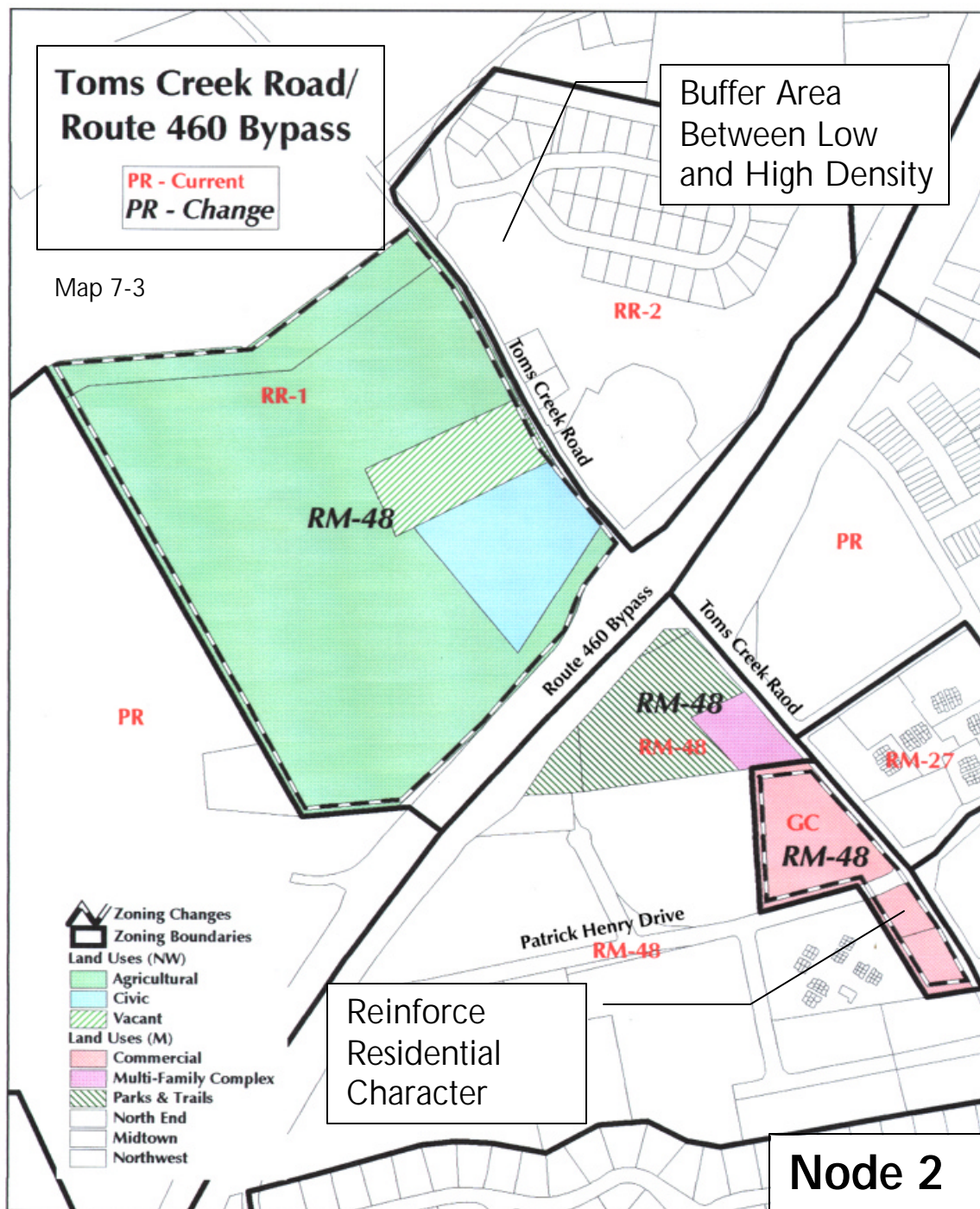
b) Tom's Creek Road/Route 460 Bypass AreaExisting Land Use and Zoning

The Toms Creek redevelopment area is located at the intersection of Tom's Creek Road and the Route 460 Bypass. The properties included in this area are properties that front Tom's Creek Road located on the west-side of the roadway. The majority of the land area identified for development is located to the north of the Bypass, including a fraternity house and a large vacant parcel. The lots south of Route 460 are smaller in size and are mostly developed, including a convenience store and a membership club (May 7-3).

The zoning characteristics of this area are bisected by Route 460 Bypass. The parcels to the north of the Bypass are zoned rural residential (RR-1) with the exception of the fraternity house, which is zoned civic. The properties south of Route 460 Bypass have higher density zoning designations. The predominant land use on this side of the highway is multi-family residential (RM-27 and RM-48). The targeted redevelopment lots on this side of Route 460 include the only commercially (general commercial, GC) zoned parcels in the area.

Zoning Recommendations

Due to the obvious intention of the Town to concentrate multi-family development in this area, RKG Associates feels that continuing this trend is the best course of action. It is recommended that all of the properties in this area be rezoned, or maintain their zoning, as medium density multi-family residential (RM-48). This will bring continuity to the intersection, in terms of zoning, as well as allow the Town to maintain a "neighborhood level" of commercial development in the area. This area is best suited for small-scale, neighborhood commercial development. Under the current zoning regulations, the RM-48 designation allows for this scale of commercial development with a special use permit, and will not adversely impact the existing commercial uses. This situation offers the Town the flexibility to meet the demand for commercial uses as the area, particularly north of Route 460, continues to develop while maintaining the residential integrity of the area.

**Development Potential**

- Higher Density Residential
- Planned Commercial

Development Issues

- Introduces Higher Densities West of 460
- Good Access/Visibility
- Convenient Location for Multi-Unit Housing

c) Hethwood/Plantation Road Area**Existing Land Use and Zoning**

The Hethwood/Plantation Road area is almost totally dedicated to open space or agricultural use. The area encompasses two properties that total over 875 acres of land. The most significant portion of this area is a 500-acre parcel with frontage along the Route 460 Bypass owned by Virginia Tech. The second parcel contains the Heth farm, a 380-acre site that has no direct highway access, but is bordered by the Foxridge apartment complex to the north (Map 7-4).

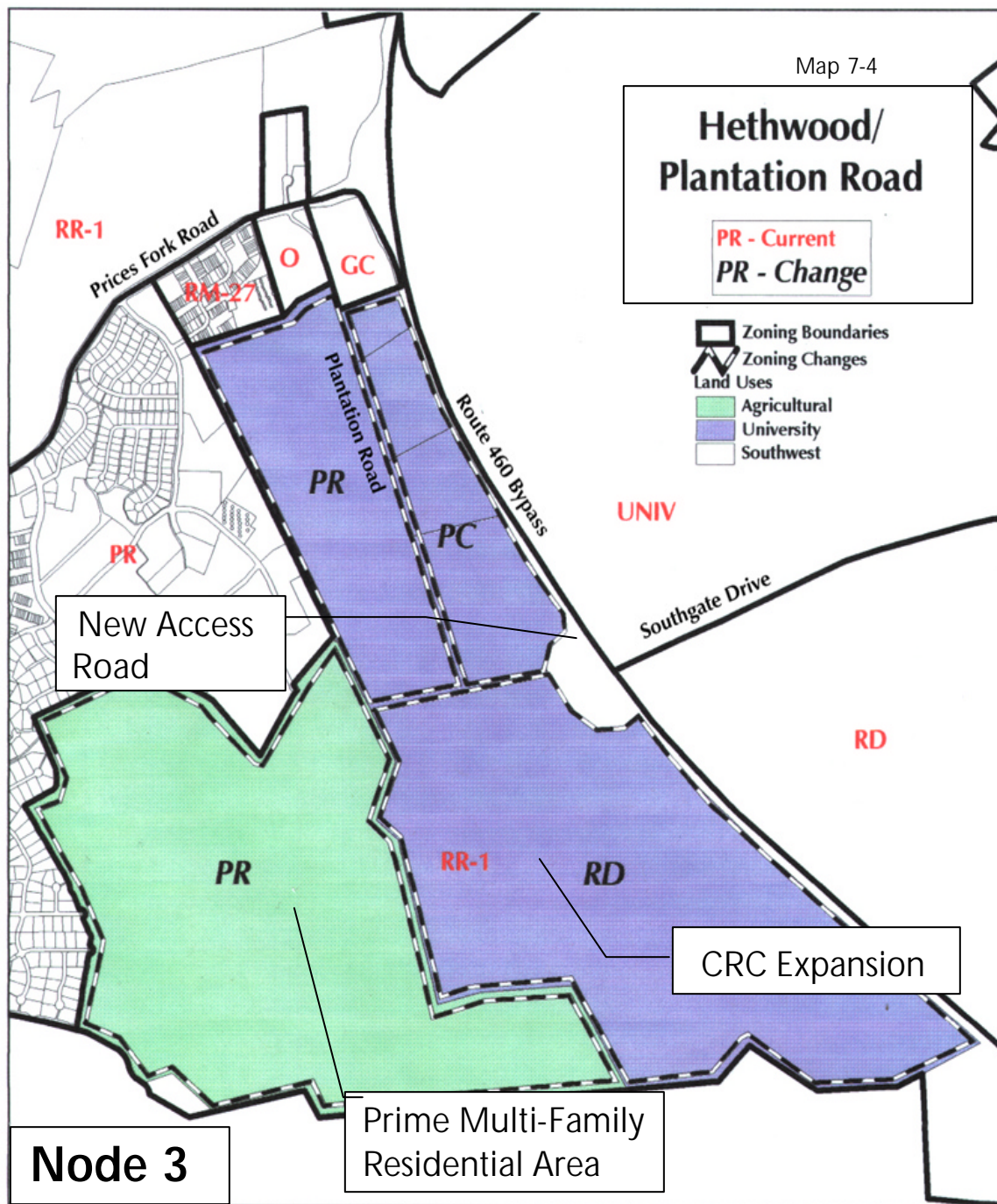
The entire 875 acres of the redevelopment area are zoned rural residential (RR-1). Under this zoning classification, the area has no potential to develop any commercial or medium-density residential uses. In addition, the lack of necessary infrastructure limits the current potential of the study area.

Zoning Recommendations

The Virginia Tech-owned property has the greatest potential to support new development. The size and location of the property makes it ideal for residential, commercial, office and/or R&D/industrial development. RKG recommends that the Town adjust the zoning boundaries of this parcel as well as change the zoning classification. As shown on the map, the consultants recommend three zoning changes for this property. For the land located to the west of Plantation Road, the consultants recommend a planned residential use. This change provides a significant increase in land zoned for multi-family use while keeping consistent with the adjoining zoning district. The area to the east of Plantation Road should be rezoned Planned Commercial. This site, with visibility from the Route 460 Bypass, is ideal for commercial and office development, although direct access to the Bypass is not likely to occur.

The planned commercial zoning will allow the Town to control the aesthetics of the development as well as preserve and modify the existing trail system on the site. The southern portion of the parcel should be rezoned research and development. This provides the Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center a large area to expand after the available parcels east of Route 460 are fully developed. This zoning change also increases the Town's capacity to support new employment generating uses.

Development of the Heth property is largely dependent upon the extension of Southgate Drive from the Virginia Tech campus entrance. Without this road connection, the site has limited ingress and egress options. RKG recommends that an access road be extended to connect the Heth property to Route 460, when this property is needed for development. This interchange will also benefit the Virginia Tech property by providing better access to the central and southern portions of the property. Assuming this change will be made, the consultants recommend that the Heth Farm property be used for a planned residential development. As with the portion of the Virginia Tech property, this parcel would be a natural extension of the adjacent planned residential development.



Development Potential

- Planned Residential
- Planned Commercial
- Research & Development

Development Issues

- Prime Growth Area
- Good Site Visibility
- Needs Improved Access
- Supports Larger Uses
- Supports Multi-Unit Housing
- Expansion Area for CRC

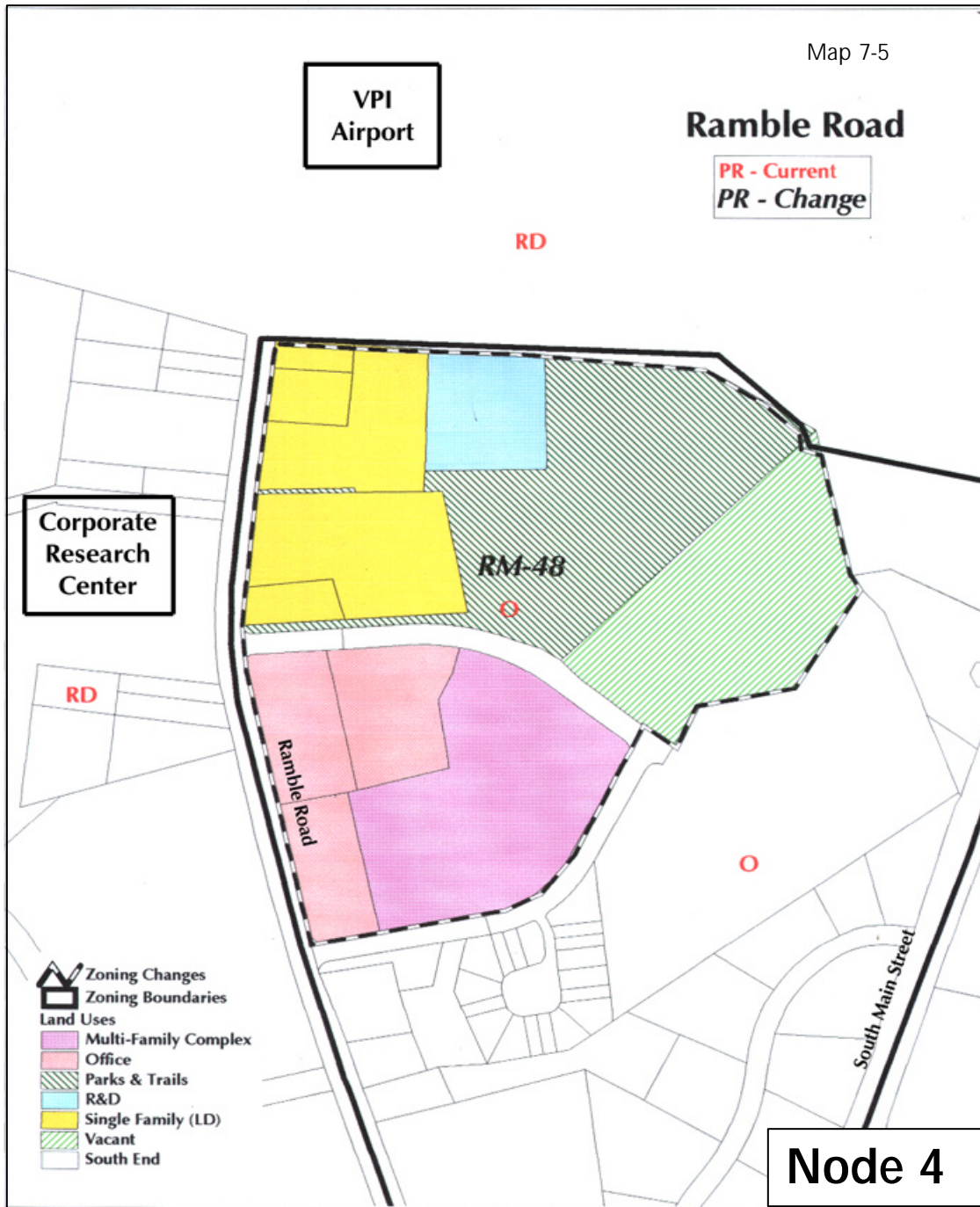
d) Ramble Road AreaExisting Land Use and Zoning

The land uses in this zoning district range from single-family houses and townhouses to traditional office space. The Corporate Research Center borders the sites in question to the west, while the Virginia Tech airport borders them to the north. The South Main Street Redevelopment area borders the study area to the east (Map 7-5).

The entire study area is currently zoned office (O) despite a wide range of land uses in the zoning district. The properties belonging to the Corporate Research Center and the Virginia Tech airport are zoned research and development (RD).

Zoning Recommendations

RKG Associates believes that a zoning change to RM-48 for the parcels highlighted on the map are consistent with the general recommendations put forward in the Town's economic development plan. While the Town does lack ample office and commercial land, this particular area is believed to be better suited for residential development. Although the CRC development may eventually abut this area in the future, its low-density development style is not likely to have negative impact on nearby residential developments. In addition, this area is removed from any significant single-family detached housing developments and offers the Town an alternate location to allow multi-family style housing without the potential opposition from single-family homeowners.



Development Potential

- Higher Density Residential
- Office

Development Issues

- Potential Encroachment from Commercial Uses

e) South Main Street Redevelopment AreaExisting Land Use and Zoning

The South Main Street redevelopment area is a collection of the frontage parcels along South Main Street, spanning from the Blacksburg Industrial Park up to the intersection of Country Club Drive and South Main. This area is currently developed with various retail, office, and service uses, where many sites are underutilized and are in decline. The most predominant uses are professional offices (along the southern portion of the corridor), auto services, and commercial shopping centers (located near Country Club Drive) (Map 7-6).

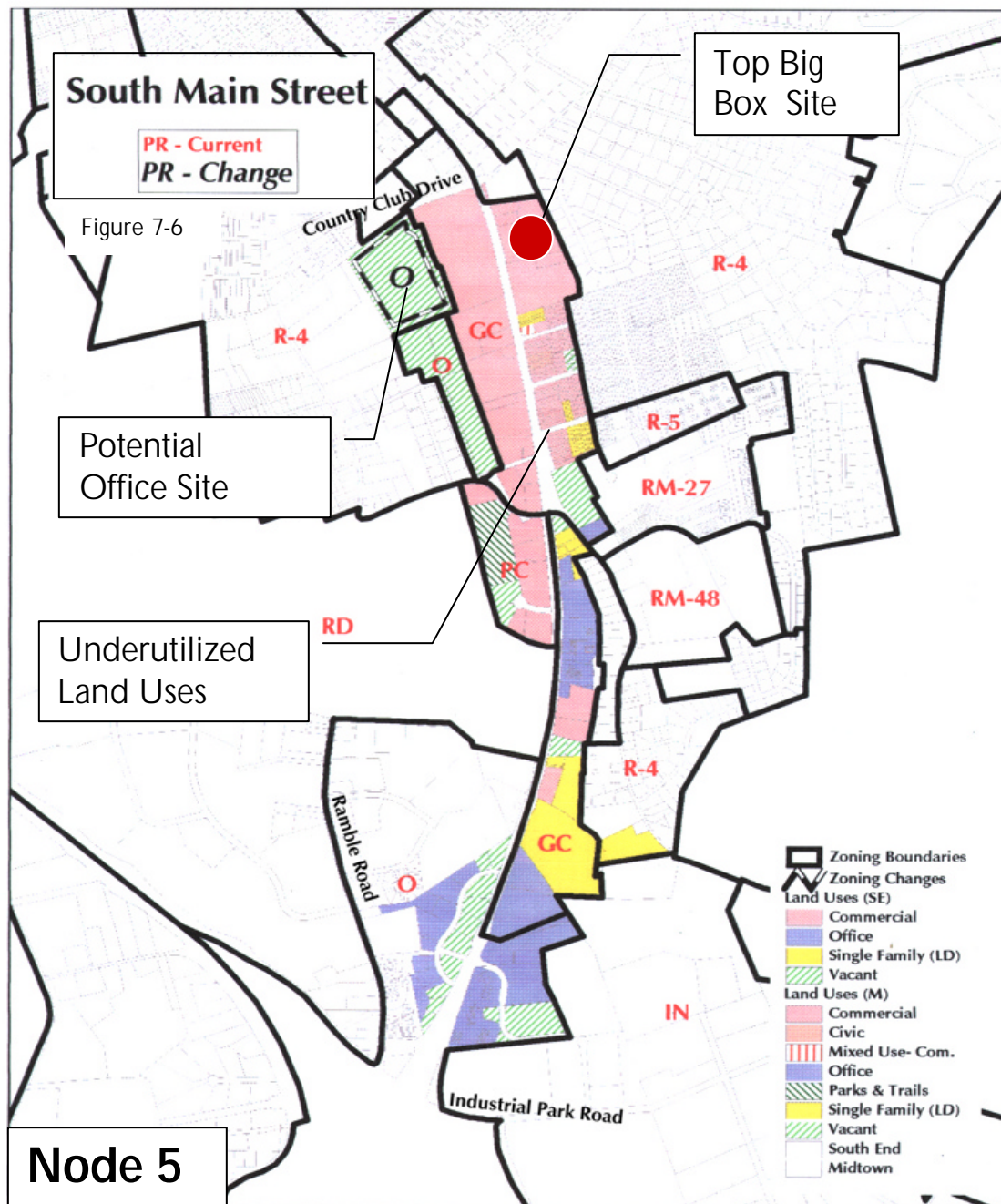
The zoning along the corridor is primarily general commercial (GC), with some office (O) zoning to the west of South Main Street. There is also a small group of parcels zoned planned commercial (PC). The VPI airport property, zoned Research and Development (RD), abuts the South Main Street corridor, separating the primary commercial area from the predominantly office area.

Zoning Recommendations

The South Main Street corridor needs very little rezoning. In fact, there is only one lot that has been recommended for a rezoning (see map). The focus for this area is a comprehensive redevelopment strategy to improve the appearance and function of this corridor. This commercial corridor has the potential to accommodate a higher level of commercial activity and the quality and density of development can be improved. There are several undersized and under performing land uses along South Main Street that should be rehabilitated or redeveloped to allow more intense use of the land. It is important to note that the consultants are not proposing a full-scale redevelopment of this corridor, but rather an improvement of productive uses and the redevelopment of under-performing or antiquated properties.

The completion of the 3A-interchange project will improve the accessibility of the South Main Street corridor, bringing higher traffic volumes. This increased traffic volume could make this area slightly more attractive to retailers by increasing the number of potential customers that drive past their businesses.

A rezoning of the Blacksburg Square Shopping Center property may be necessary if it turns out that this property is no longer a viable retail location. Increasing allowable development densities and expanding the range of permitted uses may provide the financial incentives necessary to encourage redevelopment. As stated previously, rezoning of this property to high-density residential, R&D, or professional office would focus redevelopment on three market segments that are both strong and deep in Blacksburg and that would view this as a prime location.



Development Potential

- Primary Redevelopment Area
- Best Location for Larger Retail Use
- Upgrade Property Conditions and Values
- General Commercial, Office and R&D

Development Issues

- Good Access/Visibility
- Land Assemblage Needed
- Need a Redevelopment Plan
- Incentives for Reinvestment
- Potential Rezoning of Blacksburg Square for non-retail uses

10. Encourage Construction of a Major Performing Arts Center in the Downtown

One of the best opportunities to create a unique attraction in the downtown is the proposed performing arts center being considered by Virginia Tech. The location of this facility in the downtown would create an anchor use on the northern end of the district, create a nighttime and weekend use, increase pedestrian activity, and generally add to the vitality of the district. The Town of Blacksburg should become a partner with the university to ensure that this facility gets constructed and ultimately benefits the Downtown and the community as a whole.

The Blacksburg Partnership should serve as a liaison between Virginia Tech and Town government. The Town's role in this project could vary, depending on the needs of the project. However, the most likely role for the Town would be as a provider of infrastructure improvements such as streetscape, landscaping, and a parking structure.

C. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC PLAN MATRIX

The following section contains the Blacksburg Economic Development Strategic Plan Matrix. The matrix is a complete itemization of all strategic plan recommendations, including goal statements, implementation timelines, implementation leaders, and conceptual cost estimates. This matrix can be used to guide the Town in its economic development planning efforts over the next 20 years, as well as assist in setting local implementation priorities.

The following action plan matrix organizes and presents the vision, goals, and actions contained in the Town's economic development strategic plan. *The 2020 Blacksburg Economic Development Strategic Plan* contains roughly 90 recommendations organized under six main topics: (1) Downtown Revitalization, (2) Business Development & Assistance, (3) Industrial Development, (4) Housing, (5) Neighborhood Enhancement, and (6) Quality of Life. The policy direction of the action plan was shaped by input obtained from several different groups including the general public, a strategic plan steering committee comprised on member of the Business Relations Advisory Committee, and a visioning group consisting of members of the business community, general public, university officials, and local government leaders. In addition, two expert panel group meetings were conducted with representatives from retail, service, manufacturing, and R&D industries in Blacksburg.